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Messenger Matters: European Union Studies outside Europe and Public Diplomacy by Proxy

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Abstract: Public diplomacy has gained worldwide acceptance due to its role in engaging foreign publics and fostering mutual understanding. However, as an integral part of public diplomacy, a message on its own cannot necessarily generate the expected effect among target groups. By drawing upon the two-step flow of communication theory, this paper discusses the credibility of messengers in public diplomacy and the practical necessity of public diplomacy by proxy. Through looking at the Jean Monnet Programme, one of the European Union (EU) studies programmes launched by the EU, and its implementation in China, the paper aims to develop an understanding of how EU public diplomacy by proxy is implemented towards target countries.

Key words: Two-Step Flow of Communication, Messenger, Public Diplomacy by Proxy, the Jean Monnet Programme, European Union, China

Introduction

Public diplomacy has gained worldwide acceptance in contemporary international relations, due to its important role in engaging foreign publics and fostering mutual understanding. It had been in practice long before the current debate on it began,¹ but the earliest definition of public diplomacy, which emphasizes the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies, was given by Edmund A. Gullion in 1965.² As the research into it has deepened, public diplomacy has also been conceptualized as an indirect process of influencing foreign governments and their policies, whether through direct engagement with their publics³ or through a government's strategy of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to understand their government and society.⁴

With the increasing participation of non-state actors and the prevalence of internet-based communication technologies, Melissen suggests that large and small non-state actors, and other supranational and subnational players, also participate in and design their own public diplomacy policies that extend beyond the traditional public diplomacy initiated by states.⁵

¹ N. J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy before Gullion: the Evolution of a Phrase* (USC Public Diplomacy Series, 2006):2

² Edward Murrow Center, 'What is Public Diplomacy?', available at: <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy> (1965) (Accessed 15 April 2014)

³ G. Malone, 'Managing Public Diplomacy', *The Washington Quarterly*, 8(3) (1985): 199-213

⁴ H. Tuch, *Communicating with the World: U.S. Public Diplomacy Overseas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990): 3

⁵ J. Melissen, 'The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice', in J. Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005):3-27

This is echoed by Gregory, who defines public diplomacy as ‘an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub- and non-state actors to advance their interests and values’.⁶

The EU is no exception. As a supranational organization, the EU is to some degree a model of regional integration, and its success regarding regional integration is admired more outside the EU than at home.⁷ However, its international influence is currently under pressure since the financial crisis, internal bickering and competing national agendas have had an adverse impact on its image abroad.⁸ Considering that the role of the EU in the world is determined by both its internal capacity and its external influence beyond its borders,⁹ it needs public diplomacy in order to inform the world audience about what it does and what it stands for, and to enhance the attractiveness of the EU by engaging these foreign publics.¹⁰

The influence of the EU through its message relates to the internal formation of European identity and to the external diffusion of its founding norms.¹¹ Some may argue that ‘speaking with one voice’ is the primary concern of the EU’s public diplomacy, considering that its institutional complex may prevent one voice from being heard.¹² But, as Litvinsky suggests, the rhetoric that the EU lacks one voice does not apply, as it is not a nation state.¹³ Rather, a common message does exist.¹⁴ Following this logic, strategic narratives,¹⁵ representational force,¹⁶ and sociolinguistic construction¹⁷ closely relating to

⁶ B. Gregory, ‘American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 6 (2011):351-372

⁷ European Commission, ‘The Future of EU Studies’, background document of the Jean Monnet Conference 2014, Brussels, 1-2 October, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/events/2014/doc/jm-conference-points-wg4_en.pdf (Accessed 17 April 2015)

⁸ United States National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, NIC report (2008):32

⁹ C. Bretherton and J. Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor* (London: Routledge, 2005):2

¹⁰ A. Michalski, ‘The EU as a Soft Power: the Force of Persuasion’, In Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005):124-146

¹¹ S.B. Rasmussen, ‘The Messages and Practices of the European Union’s Public Diplomacy’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 5 (2010):263-287

¹² T. Vončina, ‘Speaking with One Voice: Statement and Declarations as an Instrument of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy’, *EFA Rev.*, 16(2) (2011):169-186

¹³ M. Litvinsky, *European Union Public Diplomacy: The Need for a New Frame*, Master’s degree thesis, The George Washington University (2010):4

¹⁴ Rasmussen, *supra*, n. 11

¹⁵ A. Miskimmon, B. O’Loughlin and L. Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013):138

¹⁶ J. B. Mattern, ‘Why Soft Power Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33(3) (2005):583-612

information-oriented public diplomacy are put forward as factors, which emphasize the importance of message in effect public diplomacy.

Nevertheless, a good message does not necessarily lead to an expected effect. The message of the EU, whether it is reflected in information activities or carried by educational and cultural programmes, aims to reach its foreign publics through a communication process. However, from the perspective of communication effect research, the effectiveness of public diplomacy is also affected by the credibility of information sources.¹⁸ Thus, for the communicators who cannot reach their audiences directly, the credibility of messenger have a determining effect because the wrong messenger will ruin the meanings the message carries, no matter how good the message is.¹⁹ Since the EU is viewed as a model of regional integration and endeavours to promote EU norms, its message is loud and clear. Thus, this paper concerns the question of how to ensure that the EU's message is communicated to its end recipients by an appropriate messenger.

Thanks to the launch of academic programmes to support EU studies outside Europe, those scholars and experts who obtain financial support effectively serve as messengers, broadcasting the EU's message to non-EU countries. These experts may have multiple functions in their home countries, whether as professors who deliver knowledge about the EU to students; commentators in the mass media, who help set the frame and agenda for public discussion; as bridges connecting the EU with third countries, who can thereby provide feedback to the EU. Given that the Jean Monnet Programme (one of the EU studies programmes sponsored by the EU) has been implemented in China for 14 years -- a time span long enough to be able to evaluate its effects, in concert with case study as a better way to research contemporary events that cannot not be isolated from its social context,²⁰ this research takes the implementation of the Jean Monnet Programme in China as a case to study EU public diplomacy by proxy and collects the first-hand material by interviewing EU official and Chinese professors.

Due to time and financial constraints, this research used the technique of snow-ball sampling -- asking the interviewees to recommend other interviewees.²¹ During four-month fieldwork in China and Belgium (December 2013-February 2014, December 2014-February 2015), seven EU officials and eleven Chinese professors were interviewed. Although the interview

¹⁷ T. Solomon, 'The Affective Underpinnings of Soft Power', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(3) (2014):720-742

¹⁸ C. I. Hovland, and W. Weiss, 'The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15(4) (1951):635-650

¹⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, *Improving the U.S. Public Diplomacy Campaign in the War against Terrorism*, Task Force Report No. 38 (2001), available at: <http://www.cfr.org/terrorism/improving-us-public-diplomacy-campaign-war-against-terrorism/p4215>, (Accessed 02 April 2015)

²⁰ Yin, R.K., *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (2nd edition)*, (London: Sage):6

²¹ Small, M.L., 'How Many Cases Do I Need? On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research', *Ethnology*, 10(1) (2009): 5-38

questions were designed long before the interview, the face-to-face interview from one to another was not a simple repetition. Based on the previous one, the interview practice was in the process of continuous adjustment and re-evaluation, and eventually, each new interviewee cannot tell more that the researcher has not heard before regarding specific interview questions. Thus, the quantity of the interviewees in the field-based research about the effect of the Jean Monnet Programme in China attained saturation. With the empirical data, the study can tell us how EU public diplomacy is implemented on the ground, or more generally, how important the messenger is in public diplomacy.

Therefore, the remainder of this paper consists of four sections. The first section provides a theoretical framework covering the two-step flow of communication and public diplomacy in proxy. The second puts the promotion of EU studies in the context of EU public diplomacy by proxy, with the aim of figuring out the connections between the two. Combining this with the interviews in China and Belgium, the third and fourth parts will then analyse how to communicate the EU in academic programmes from the perspective of EU officials, and how the proxy for EU public diplomacy in China works.

1. The Two-Step Flow of Communication and Public Diplomacy by Proxy

Drawing on the different understandings of public diplomacy mentioned above, this paper defines public diplomacy as a cross-border two-way communication process, deployed and carried out by different actors who participate in international relations, with the aim of projecting a favourable image, influencing foreign perceptions and eventually serving the national interests in the long run. Thus, irrespective of specific channels, tools and aims, public diplomacy is a communication process, although the audience is located within a different cultural context. However, public diplomacy does not always seek its mass audience directly, meaning we must consider the two-step flow model in the transnational communication context.

The two-step flow of communication, first formulated in 1944, implies that ideas often flow from radio and print to opinion leaders, and from these to less active sections of the population,²² emphasizing the effect of interpersonal communication as a channel of communication. In this process, opinion leaders are not only information providers but also information seekers.²³ Accordingly, it is opinion leaders, rather than the mass media, who have the most influence on the media audience.²⁴ More importantly, further research has

²² P. F. Lazarsfeld, B. Berelson and H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948):151

²³ E. C. Nisbet, 'The Engagement Model of Opinion Leadership: Testing Validity Within A European Context', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 18(1) (2005):3-30

²⁴ E. A. Yepsen, *Practicing Successful Twitter Public Diplomacy: A model and case study of U.S. efforts in Venezuela*, CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy Paper 6, University of Southern California (2012):13

proven that opinion leaders and the people they influence are very much alike, and typically belong to the same primary groups.²⁵ Although the two-step flow model is based on the study of interpersonal communication occurring within one country, its application to public diplomacy – a transnational communication practice – can offer different insights into the practice of public diplomacy.

Since public diplomacy is a form of cross-border communication, finding an appropriate messenger (i.e., an opinion leader influential with the target groups) can solve three problems. First, public diplomacy requires credibility, but official information channels always lack credibility.²⁶ Therefore, a credible proxy who can speak on behalf of the implementers of public diplomacy will be helpful in sharing the total burden shouldered by the implementers, and increasing the effect of public diplomacy.²⁷ Second, public diplomacy is a form of transnational and sometimes even transcultural communication, meaning that its message not only needs to reach the target audience but it also needs to make sense to them. Messengers in similar cultures or the same countries as the audience can explain the message to them while speaking for the implementer of public diplomacy. Third, high visibility does not necessarily lead to a favourable image.²⁸ A messenger communicating the information on behalf of the implementer can help lower the visibility of the implementer behind the public diplomacy message. This paper will not address this point further, but Manheim's findings remain persuasive.

It is worth noting that scholarly discussion has already begun to apply the two-step flow model to public diplomacy. The relationship between social media users and their followers in information sharing is comparable to that of opinion leaders and the people influenced in this model, which explains why social media – with its characteristics of interpersonal communication – is utilized to conduct public diplomacy in target countries.²⁹ Based on the two-step flow model, experienced public diplomacy officers know fully well that a credible human factor is important in effective communication, meaning that a message transmitted by the mass media is far more credible but would have a greater impact if it were relayed to audiences by key opinion leaders.³⁰ British public diplomacy also puts emphasis on elites, who then mediate and multiply the message in order to reach the wider masses, which is in

²⁵ E. Katz, 'The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-To-Date Report on an Hypothesis', *Political Opinion Quarterly*, 21(1) (1957):61-78

²⁶ H. Jungermann, H.-R. Pfister and K. Fischer, 'Credibility, Information Preference, and Information Interests', *Risk Analysis*, 16(2) (1996):251-261

²⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, *Improving the U.S. Public Diplomacy Campaign in the War against Terrorism*, Task Force Report No. 38 (2001), available at: <http://www.cfr.org/terrorism/improving-us-public-diplomacy-campaign-war-against-terrorism/p4215>, (Accessed 02 April 2015)

²⁸ J. B. Manheim, *Strategic Public Diplomacy and American Foreign Policy: The Evolution of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994):126-147

²⁹ Yepsen, *supra*, n 24

³⁰ W. A. Rugh, *Front Line Public Diplomacy: How US Embassies Communicate with Foreign Publics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014):73

line with the two-step flow.³¹ Indeed, applying the two-step flow model to public diplomacy not only solves the credibility problems but also addresses certain ethical concerns.³² These studies point out the similarity between the two-step flow model and public diplomacy as a cross-border communication process, and the necessity of looking for a credible message, yet they do not concentrate on it as an independent phenomenon of public diplomacy practice.

While researching EU public diplomacy practices, Rasmussen suggests that supporting civil society activities in target countries can help the EU deliver its message through civil society actors, because of the credibility of the latter; this is called 'public diplomacy by proxy'.³³ However, Winston Churchill, former Prime Minister of the UK, was already embracing public diplomacy by proxy when seeking aid from the US during the Second World War, in that, according to Churchill, it was helpful to use America's own voices – particularly those of journalists and reporters with good reputation – to convince the US public that it was in the best interests of the US to aid Britain.³⁴ Both these cases locate the proxies for public diplomacy inside the target countries.

The proxy for public diplomacy can also be outside the target countries. Through studying the competition for diplomatic recognition between the People's Republic of China (P.R. China) and Taiwan in Central America, Alexander noticed that certain poor countries switched their diplomatic relations from Taiwan to Beijing, because of the promise of huge investment. This made other poor Central American republics diplomatically salivate, after witnessing the special treatment offered by Beijing, and many followed suit in establishing diplomatic relations with P.R. China.³⁵ Thus, public diplomacy by proxy can also be understood as the performance of public diplomacy within one nation state, with the intention of creating favourable opinion among the public and elites of another nation state.³⁶

In the cases above, it is clear that there are two different kinds of proxies in public diplomacy. In the former case, civil society actors originating from the target countries can serve as internal proxies for EU public diplomacy, which highlights the influence of civil society actors

³¹ J. Pamment, *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Study of Policy and Practice* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013):75

³² E. Sevin, 'Thinking about Place Branding: Ethics of Concept', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 7 (2011):155-164

³³ Rasmussen, *supra*, n. 11

³⁴ P. Seib, *Real-time Diplomacy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012):116

³⁵ C. Alexander, *China, Costa Rica, and the Race for U.N. Security General*, Centre on Public Diplomacy, University of South California (2011), available at: http://usepublicdiplomacy.org/blog/china_costa_rica_and_the_race_for_un_secretary_general. (Accessed 02 April 2015)

³⁶ C. Alexander, 'Public Diplomacy and the Diplomatic Truce: Taiwan and the People's Republic of China in El Salvador', *Public diplomacy and Place Branding*, 7(4) (2011):271-288

within their home countries. In the latter case, the proxy for China's public diplomacy towards the other Central American countries is a nation state acting as external proxy, paying attention to the attractiveness of successful models. Yet, in a way, talking about public diplomacy by proxy, from its very outset, involves looking for solutions to the credibility problems. In other words, effective public diplomacy requires credibility, yet the most credible voice is not always one's own.³⁷

In this way, public diplomacy by proxy, as a phenomenon in practice, involves the indirect engagement with foreign publics through employing messengers – either inside or outside the target countries – on behalf of the implementers, so as to enhance the credibility of the message and improve the effect of public diplomacy. Under these circumstances, public diplomacy can be broken down into two steps: the message first travels from the original implementer of public diplomacy to the proxy (messenger), and then it travels from the proxy to its end recipient (foreign publics).

2. EU Studies outside Europe and EU Public Diplomacy by Proxy

The remit of EU studies is broad, and includes the contemporary characters of the EU and the pre-1993 European Community, as well as the long view on the European integration process.³⁸ EU studies is preferred here because the academic programmes promoted by the EU to third parties always have the specific objective of promoting EU studies at this current stage. In some ways, EU studies is just another interdisciplinary research area, yet the EU's work in promoting EU studies outside of Europe can be viewed as EU public diplomacy.

Interestingly, the responsibility for promoting EU studies around the world is shouldered by a number of different Directorates-General (DGs) within the European Commission: the DG for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) has delivered EU studies programmes to developing countries within the framework of development aid;³⁹ the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) has launched the EU Centres Programme, as well as the European Union Academic Programme in Hong Kong and Macao; and the DG for Education and Culture (DG EAC) is responsible for the Jean Monnet Programme.⁴⁰ As of now, both the EU Centres Programme and the Jean Monnet Programme are still in effect.

The EU Centres Programme, under the theme of cooperation between industrialized countries, is one of the academic programmes that promote EU studies outside Europe.

³⁷ N. J. Cull, 'Public Diplomacy: Seven Lessons for its Future from its Past', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6 (2010):11-17

³⁸ A. K. Bourne and M. Cini, 'Introduction: defining boundaries and identifying trends in European Union studies', in M. Cini, and A. K. Bourne (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in European Union Studies*, (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006):3

³⁹ Interview in Beijing, China, 11 December 2013

⁴⁰ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 06 February 2015

Within the FPI, public diplomacy towards industrialized countries is implemented by supporting EU Centres, public policy think tanks and research institutes purporting to increase the visibility and enhance the positive image of the EU. To this end, EU Centres were established within universities in the target countries or areas (Australia, Canada, USA, Russia, New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) in order to promote EU studies, increase knowledge of the EU among foreign students, establish a network for information and education activities, and raise awareness of the EU among foreign publics.⁴¹ Because of the budget, only eight countries and three areas are currently covered by this programme.⁴²

The Jean Monnet Programme is not, strictly speaking, a public diplomacy programme, yet it does serve the function of public diplomacy in practice.⁴³ It was originally launched in 1989 within the EU, and promoted to countries outside the EU in 2001, which involved the creation of Jean Monnet Chairs, Centres of Excellence, Modules, information and research activities, and support for academic associations of professors and researchers to research European integration. According to official EC data, as of 2014, this programme has covered 77 countries, helping to establish 165 Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence, 879 Jean Monnet Chairs, and 2,139 permanent courses and Jean Monnet Modules between 1990 and 2011.⁴⁴

In spite of their shared objectives in promoting EU studies, these two programmes were launched and conducted by different institutions in keeping with their respective capabilities.⁴⁵ Interestingly, according to Vito Borrelli, Head of Sector, Jean Monnet and China Desk, the Jean Monnet Programme will eventually incorporate the EU Centres Programme, due to its success, meaning that the EU Centres will become Jean Monnet Centres sometime in the coming years.⁴⁶ Thus, the implementation of the Jean Monnet Programme will be studied as a case of EU public diplomacy by proxy. Besides, this programme is under-researched, although scholars have previously called for research into how identity creation and ideology transfer are at work within the context of EU studies centres and Jean Monnet Chairs.⁴⁷

⁴¹ EU Centres, available at: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-centres/index_en.htm (Accessed 10 April 2014)

⁴² Conversation with Dr. Jolita Pons, Desk officer for China, Hong Kong and Macau of the EEAS, in the roundtable discussion affiliated with the ECRAN annual conference in Brussels, 17 June 2014

⁴³ O. Quintin, 'Speech in the closing session of the conference of 20 Years of Support for European Integration Studies', in European Union (ed.), *20 Years of Support for European Integration Studies: From the Jean Monnet Action to the Jean Monnet Programme*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union (2011):327-332

⁴⁴ Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency (EACEA), Information about the Jean Monnet Programme from 2007-2013 (2014), available at: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/jean_monnet/jean_monnet_en.php (Accessed 29 September 2014)

⁴⁵ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 06 February 2015

⁴⁶ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 05 February 2015

⁴⁷ G. Wiessala, 'Social-Cultural and Educational Cooperation between the EU and Asia', in

Before 2014, the main aim of the Jean Monnet Programme was to increase knowledge of European integration, by promoting teaching, research and debate on every aspect of the EU and its relations with the world, and thus stimulate knowledge exchange among professionals.⁴⁸ After being integrated into the new 'Erasmus Plus' programme in 2014, the aim of the Jean Monnet Programme has been specified as innovation (studying the EU from new angles and through new methodologies), cross-fertilisation (boosting the knowledge of the EU) and knowledge dissemination of the EU, making this programme more inclusive.⁴⁹ Thus, the Jean Monnet Programme does have a public diplomacy function, with its specific aim of disseminating knowledge about European integration by promoting teaching, research and debate on the history, politics, economics and law of the EU, and the EU's relations with the rest of the world.⁵⁰

More importantly, it holds comparative advantages when explaining the EU to the whole world. In practice, those professors who perform their research with the support of the Jean Monnet Programme in their own countries become proxies for EU public diplomacy. According to the discussion relating to the two-step flow model in a transnational communication context, the Jean Monnet Programme also possesses certain advantages in explaining the EU to college students and to the general public.

First, university professors always possess high credibility as an information source.⁵¹ Although the eligibility of applicants has not been verified, the centre director at Sichuan University regarded previous research results and interest in the EU as prerequisites for obtaining funding, so these professors are bound to both know a great deal about and have a clear research preference for the EU. Such scholars and experts then inform students about the EU's work, as well as the broader public through media interviews.⁵²

Besides this, the credibility of the Jean Monnet Programme is based on its independence from the political sphere. Di Fonzo, who has worked in this programme for almost 20 years, has stated that the original creators of the Jean Monnet Programme tried to design a pure academic programme and kept it separate from any political influence back then, which has

Christiansen, T. Kirchner, E. and Murray, P. B. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of EU-Asia Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2013):221-225

⁴⁸ EACEA, Short Presentation of the Jean Monnet Programme in 10 Points (2012), available at: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/jean_monnet/documents/jm_in_10_points_webupdate_may2012_en.pdf, (Accessed 18 April 2015)

⁴⁹ EACEA, Erasmus Plus Programme Guide (2014), available at: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf, (Accessed 14 March 2015)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jungermann, *supra*, n 26

⁵² European Commission, *Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council, Establishing 'Erasmus for All', the Union programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport*, COM (2011) 788 Final, Brussels, 23rd Nov. (2011): 21

constituted one of the most significant features of this programme.⁵³

Second, the Jean Monnet Programme is able to cross cultural barriers and make the EU's message more acceptable, because the professors sponsored by this programme who serve as the proxies for EU public diplomacy already display a preference towards the EU, whilst retaining a discursive power in their target countries based on their academic reputation.⁵⁴ This goes to prove that public diplomacy is, by its nature, an activity of spanning borders that exist both physically and psychologically.⁵⁵ As mentioned before, the two-step flow of communication theory takes effect because the opinion leaders and the people they influence belong to the same primary group.⁵⁶ Therefore, these professors are not only able to deliver accurate knowledge of the EU to college students, but they also have the power to influence these students' knowledge learning and perception formation, based on the interpersonal communication between these two highly similar groups: professors and college students.

Third, since the Jean Monnet Programme communicates the EU's message to college students by supporting academic research on the EU, it is able to achieve a greater level of output with less input. By supporting academic research, the programme is able to influence and inform a significant number of those teachers' students, many of whom will be from overseas, thus further broadening the Jean Monnet Programme's reach.

Whether we look at EU studies programmes in general, or study the Jean Monnet Programme in particular, it is clear that the support offered to foreign professors to research the EU and to teach college students in their home countries reflects the ways in which the EU's public diplomacy by proxy has been implemented in practice. In the following two sections, empirical data collected from interviews with EU officials and Chinese professors participated in the Jean Monnet Programme will be analysed.

3. EU Officials: Bringing the European Project to Chinese Publics

The actors of EU public diplomacy in China include the Delegation of the EU to China, the EU's own online posts through their official social media account, and the cultural and educational branches of its member states. The Delegation is viewed as providing credible resources to the Chinese media⁵⁷, but, following the rules of the media, attractive news stories still tend to be favoured over accurate information. While social media provides a

⁵³ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 17 February 2015

⁵⁴ Interview in Chengdu, Sichuan, China, 17 December 2013

⁵⁵ A. Fisher, (2013), *Collaborative Public Diplomacy: how transnational networks influenced American studies in Europe*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 10

⁵⁶ Katz, *supra*, n.25

⁵⁷ N. Chaban, S. Kelly, and J. Bain, 'European Commission Delegations and EU Public Policy: Stakeholders' Perception from the Asia-Pacific', *EFA Rev*, 14(2) (2009): 271-288

platform for the EU to engage with the Chinese public directly, they rarely respond to questions raised by Chinese followers.⁵⁸ Besides, the agendas of the individual branches of member states might compete with that of the EU when it comes to public diplomacy. Thus, the Jean Monnet Programme may offer a way out.

At the very beginning, the Jean Monnet Programme was designed to shrink the gap between the elites' and citizens' perceptions of European integration. Indeed, when the Declaration of European Identity was released in 1973, a consensus had been reached among the visionary leaders of the EU concerning the need to bring the European project closer to the man in the street.⁵⁹ Finally, the first decisions of the Jean Monnet Action (the predecessor of the Jean Monnet Programme) were made in 1990, after a series of meetings and procedures.⁶⁰ Up until 1998, the Jean Monnet Action sponsored over 500 professors, who led at least 1,400 seminars within the EU member states, in which around 251,000 students participated.⁶¹ On top of this, over 1,200 PhD students' theses were written under the supervision of the Jean Monnet Professors.⁶²

Despite the fact that it was originally designed for EU citizens, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were also included in this programme before they officially joined the EU family,⁶³ which provided a prelude for the EU's extension of this programme to non-EU states outside Europe though China and those candidate countries that eventually became member states of the EU were qualitatively different. However, extending the target countries of the Jean Monnet Programme required certain procedural issues to be addressed. On the one hand, the successful experience of implementing the Jean Monnet Programme within EU member states and candidate countries led to the programme managers who were in office at that time considering promoting this successful experience to non-EU member states. On the other hand, it required a new budget plan and the relevant decisions from the Parliament. By 2001, a new budget for an extended Jean Monnet Programme with an enlarged target group had been proposed and was eventually approved.⁶⁴ Some officials

⁵⁸ C. Bjola and L. Jiang, 'Social Media and Public Diplomacy: A Comparative Analysis of the Digital Diplomatic Strategies of the EU, US and Japan in China', in C. Bjola and M. Holmes (eds.), *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015):27

⁵⁹ The Virtual Resource Centre of Knowledge about Europe (CVCE), The Tindemans Report (2013), available at:

http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1997/10/13/03f0d181-4838-4a86-a1b5-f143bb34cbd0/publishable_en.pdf, (Accessed 20 October 2014)

⁶⁰ European Union, *Thinking about Europe: Jean Monnet support to European studies*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, (2014):25

⁶¹ ECOTEC Research and Consulting, External Evaluation Report of the Jean Monnet Action (1999), available at:
http://collection.europarchive.org/dnb/20070702132253/http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/1999/jeanmonnet/JMintrep_fr.pdf (Accessed 20 October 2014)

⁶² O. Calligaro, *Negotiating Europe: EU Promotion of Europeanness since the 1950s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013):35

⁶³ European Union, *supra*. n.60

⁶⁴ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 17 February 2015

also stated that the EU's global strategy, which was released around 2001, also required the EU to start communicating its message to the outside world, which could have resulted in the promotion of the Jean Monnet Programme outside Europe.⁶⁵ With 25 years of practice, the increasing number of target countries and the scale of the sponsored projects manifest the vitality of the programme in promoting EU studies outside Europe.

The Jean Monnet Programme has also made adjustment in order to adapt to developments within the EU and to the requirements of external applicants. Because of its success, the Jean Monnet Action became the Jean Monnet Programme, with the same status as other EU educational programme, in 2007.⁶⁶ After being integrated into the Erasmus Plus, its aims changed slightly from supporting 'European integration studies' to supporting 'EU studies', making this programme more inclusive. According to Girelli, a programme manager for the Jean Monnet Programme, European integration studies placed more emphasis on the EU member states and its candidate countries, while EU studies pays more attention to the relations between the EU and non-EU states.⁶⁷ Borrelli added that the former focused on political and economic aspects of integration, while the latter extends to other aspects, such as culture and identity. In addition, the limits stipulating that a Jean Monnet Chair holder cannot be granted this award twice were removed, which has meant professors can receive funding from the EU continuously, to help them carry out their research.⁶⁸ In this sense, it seems that the Jean Monnet Programme also has a feedback mechanism in place that allows for the EU to redirect the programme towards whatever interests its audience.

Based on the selection criteria of the Jean Monnet Action, a Jean Monnet Chair has to deliver at least 90 hours of teaching per semester and each Jean Monnet Module lasts at least 40 hours per semester. Put differently, both the Jean Monnet Chairs and Jean Monnet Modules are closely related to knowledge delivery in the classroom. Besides, the Jean Monnet Programme also supports scholarly exchange by establishing multilateral research groups among universities in different countries and holding international conferences in Jean Monnet Centres, which promote information dissemination and knowledge exchange. Thus, some scholars have also argued that the EU allocates considerable financial resources to the Jean Monnet Programme in order to achieve two goals: to increase the attractiveness of the EU for scholarly study and to provide a more accurate image of the EU.⁶⁹

A recent online survey, conducted by the European Commission's Jean Monnet team, seemed not to be a scientific study but did get some conclusions about the general acceptance of this programme with a number of 927 respondents. Response to the survey on 'EU studies' shows an overall satisfaction with the EU studies courses, the teachers, the

⁶⁵ Interview in Beijing, China, 11 December 2014.

⁶⁶ European Union, *supra*, n.60

⁶⁷ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 06 February 2015

⁶⁸ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 06 February 2015

⁶⁹ E. Sevin, 'From Visitors to Cultural Ambassadors: Public Diplomacy and Scholar Exchange Programme', Paper presented at IABD's 22nd Annual Convention in Las Vegas, NV (April 2010):582

teaching methods, and in particular with the Jean Monnet Chair holder professors.⁷⁰ In fact, as an EU studies programme implemented by the EU, it has a special role in EU public diplomacy. As mentioned by the EU officials, EU member states have a number of language education branches in different countries, and there is a system of cooperation between the EU and those branches, with the purpose of communicating the EU's message and culture.⁷¹ However, because of the diversity of the EU, it is hard to say which one is better to tell the EU's story in China on behalf of the EU.⁷² In this sense, extending the Jean Monnet Programme to China can let the EU's voice be heard by Chinese public.

If the analysis above only identifies the general output of the Jean Monnet Programme, its implementation in China should also be seen as a great achievement. China is by far the most active Asian country in the field of EU studies in the context of the Jean Monnet Programme. Under the 2014 call for proposals, five projects were selected from a total of seven applications submitted, representing a 71% success rate in the current selection year and continuing a trend established over recent years (applications selected between 2008-2013 totalled 21 out of 41 submitted). Since 2001, 11 Jean Monnet Modules, 15 Jean Monnet Chairs, two 'Ad Personam' Jean Monnet Chairs, three Jean Monnet Centres, two Activities in support of national networks, one multilateral research group and one Jean Monnet Project have been awarded to Chinese applicants.⁷³ Considering that the Chinese perception of the EU is shaped by EU-China relations and the teaching of the EU in China⁷⁴ and Chinese professors specialising in EU studies mainly display a preference towards the EU,⁷⁵ promoting EU studies in China with the necessary financial support is beneficial to the EU and increases its influence. On top of this, as one of the Jean Monnet Programme new actions in the Erasmus Plus, a Jean Monnet Project was awarded to Sichuan University, which aimed to support professors in training teachers from primary and secondary schools in the subject of the EU, so that these trained teachers can in turn teach their students.⁷⁶ Thus, it seems that this programme has extended its influence to teenagers beyond college students.

Admittedly, the Jean Monnet Programme does not only target China; however, interviewing relevant EU officials has helped us to understand the selection criteria, historical development and certain new changes within this programme, and its connection with EU public diplomacy by proxy.

⁷⁰ European Commission, *Result of the EU Studies Survey*, (2014), available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/events/2014/doc/eustudies-survey.pdf> (Accessed 28 March 2015)

⁷¹ Interview in Beijing, China, 11 December 2014

⁷² Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 05 February 2015

⁷³ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 06 February 2015

⁷⁴ M. U. Stumbaum, 'The Mainland China's Perception on European Regionalisation', paper presented in the Conference on The Mainland China's Perception on Asia and European Regionalisation (2013), available at: http://europe2.nhu.edu.tw/files/archive/163_5026181b.pdf (Accessed 08 April 2015)

⁷⁵ Y. Yang, 'Does the Academic Programme Work? The Jean Monnet Programme and European Union Public Diplomacy', *Journal of European Integration*, 37(6) (2015):611-628

⁷⁶ Interview in Brussels, Belgium, 06 February 2015

4. Chinese Professors: Telling the EU's Story in China

The development of EU studies in China stems from the overlapping interests between the EU and China. The development of Chinese European studies can be partially attributed to the deepening of EU-China relations, but the starting point of Chinese European studies concerns the lessons that can be learned from European experiences, in order to inform China's development.

As Song has indicated, China encountered political, social and economic problems after 30 years of reform and opening up, and Chinese scholars started introducing the Nordic model, especially the Swedish model regarding the ruling position of Social Democratic Party and its social security system, to China from the 1980s. However, these trends stopped in the late 1980s, due to internal political reasons in China.⁷⁷ However, since the 1960s, Chinese scholars and governmental officials have tried to draw lessons from the European experience of regional policy and aimed to look for effective solutions to economic disparity between different regions in China. In addition, Chinese scholars have studied other aspects of the EU, including the EU's foreign policy and external relations, its approaches to dealing with neighbouring countries, its multilateralist approaches to dealing with global and regional security, and the example of its peaceful institution and its functionalism, as a route to East Asia regional integration.⁷⁸

The Jean Monnet Programme was designed to target EU member states and then to extend to non-EU states after 10 years of its implementation. It is obvious that China is not the only target country covered by this programme, but it does promote the EU studies in China from the perspective of Chinese professors. In order to understand the implementation of the Jean Monnet Programme in China, 11 professors were interviewed from December 2013 to February 2014, and from December 2014 to January 2015. Of the 11 professors interviewed, two held 'Ad Personam' Jean Monnet Chairs, three held Jean Monnet Chairs, three were Directors (one from each centre, one of whom was also a Jean Monnet Chair), one was a professor who taught a Jean Monnet Module, and three were assistant professors.

As a vital source of funding, the Jean Monnet Programme supports EU studies in China. As mentioned above, the teaching of EU experiences is largely based on China's internal demand, but the EU's financial support also promotes the flourishing of EU studies in China. It is worth noting that, for geopolitical reasons, it is not as easy as to obtain financial support from the Chinese government for European studies as it is for Japanese or American studies.⁷⁹ This was echoed by William Fingleton, the press officer of the Delegation of the EU to China, when he stated that China-US relations are considered 'urgent' while China-EU

⁷⁷ X. Song, 'European 'Models' and Their Implications to China: Internal and External Perspectives', *Review of International Studies*, 36(3) (2010):755-775

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Interview in Chengdu, Sichuan, China, 17 December 2013

relations are only considered 'important' in diplomatic documents,⁸⁰ so China will therefore invest more into research on the former. For this reason, supporting Chinese professors to teach more courses on European studies is helpful for college students wanting to learn about and understand the EU and its role in the world.

For now, the Jean Monnet Programme exists to support foreign experts, including Chinese professors, to conduct research on the EU in Mainland China. Since these new changes to the Jean Monnet Programme – such as the cancellation of the limits on second-time applications for the Jean Monnet Chairs and increased activities with a bigger budget – have all benefitted the researchers, one director in China said that it increased the faith of Chinese scholars in conducting EU-related research, because they do not need to worry about funding.⁸¹ However, one professor also pointed out that the programme only covered a small group of universities in China, in comparison with two other educational programmes, making its impact limited.⁸²

In practice, the Jean Monnet Programme helps the dissemination of information about the EU in China. Eight of the professors who were interviewed taught at least two courses to undergraduate and postgraduate students: these courses include European integration; European economic integration; European development policy and regional policy; European social policy and its welfare system; and European cultures and European identity. They also delivered lectures to local party schools and other universities, both in China and overseas. One assistant professor taught undergraduate majors and minors in international relations focusing on European integration. As one professor mentioned, with the extra financial support, he was able to strengthen the knowledge of students by hiring research students for document collection, and inviting experts from relevant areas to give lectures.⁸³

Albeit no specific statistics about how many students participated in the relevant modules, the online introduction of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at Renmin University of China shows that 24 undergraduate, 35 postgraduate and 18 PhD students in EU studies were trained in 2012.⁸⁴ An assistant professor organized and taught part of a course on European studies to around 100 students, all of whom had no prior background in international or European studies, and he insisted that classroom teaching definitely helped these students get to know the EU. A Jean Monnet Module leader said around 40 postgraduate students registered his course every semester.⁸⁵ Considering that 10 Chinese universities are covered by the Jean Monnet Programme and the well-trained PhD students in these universities will take academic positions and teach in other universities,⁸⁶ the

⁸⁰ Interview in Beijing, China, 11 December 2014

⁸¹ Interview in Chengdu, Sichuan, China, 17 December 2013

⁸² Interview in Beijing, China, 11 December 2013

⁸³ Interview in Beijing, China, 14 December 2014

⁸⁴ Centre for European Studies at Renmin University of China, (2014), <http://www.cesruc.org/>, (accessed 10 Sept. 2015)

⁸⁵ Interview in Beijing, China, 14 December 2014

⁸⁶ Yang, *supra*, n75

quantity of Chinese college students directly or indirectly involved in this programme is huge.

Based on the professors' evaluation of the effects of EU studies on Chinese students, all the interviewees insisted that the students' knowledge had increased after attending the relevant courses. Two professors and two assistant professors considered their students to have developed a good impression of the EU as a result. One assistant professor gave lectures to students who were minoring in international relations, and, according to those professors who were teaching students majoring in other disciplines rather than international studies, the classroom teaching was the main channel for those students to obtain an accurate knowledge about the EU in order to finish their assignment and exams. The other assistant professor organized and taught a selective course to students who had no background of international studies, and he thought that this course helped those students from programmes such as physics, chemistry and engineering to broaden their horizons. After all, besides attending lectures and seminars, students from majors relating to international relations may actively seek out more information about the EU, outside of their own academic interests. One professor regarded Chinese students' perceptions of the EU to be far deeper than European students' perceptions of China, and suggested that both the Chinese students' and the public's interest in the EU had been improving in recent years, as reflected by the increasing share of news reports about the EU and EU-China relations.⁸⁷

Beyond classroom teaching, the influence of Chinese professors sponsored by the Jean Monnet Programme extends to policy-making procedure, and reaches the Chinese publics through the mass media. In terms of their impact on policy-making procedure, one professor had attended government conferences in order to counsel on policy, while another had conducted research and given advice to the government at provincial level, regarding trade with the EU. One director revealed that she had submitted reports on international conferences to her university, as well as giving policy advice on current EU issues to related government departments. However, it is hard to accurately evaluate their impact due to the opaqueness of policy making process in China. All eleven of the professor interviewees in China stated that they had either been interviewed or asked to write commentaries on the subject of the European debt crisis, EU-China relations, European integration, and EU policy on China, by a great number of newspapers, magazines and news portals. Two of them had also been invited to comment on issues relating to the EU in live broadcasts. Because the coverage of the EU in Chinese media is also influenced by marketization of mass media and EU-China relations,⁸⁸ professional comments at least provides an alternative information source for Chinese public to understand the EU.

Hence, the data presented in this section about the interviews with Chinese professors, in concert with the analysis regarding Chinese European studies, has answered one of the research questions raised in this paper: how does public diplomacy by proxy work through the Jean Monnet Programme in China?

⁸⁷ Interview in Shanghai, China, 22 December 2013

⁸⁸ Abb, P., *China's Foreign Policy Think Tanks: Changing Roles and Structural Conditions*, working paper, No. 213, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, (2013):21

Conclusion

Public diplomacy matters greatly for each of the actors on the world stage, and the EU is no exception. As a supranational organisation, the EU needs good public diplomacy to communicate its message – providing a model of regional integration and a normative power – to a global audience. However, a clear message from the EU does not necessarily lead to expected effect. By drawing upon the two-step flow of communication model, it can be inferred that EU public diplomacy requires a credible messenger on behalf of the EU to speak to the target country.

This paper has focused on the Jean Monnet Programme, one of the EU studies programmes promoted by the EU, and identified that the professors sponsored by this programme serve as the proxy for EU public diplomacy, and help the message of the EU to be communicated. Through interviewing EU officials participating in the implementation of the Jean Monnet Programme, and Chinese professors supported by this programme, it can be shown that the EU studies programmes, by supporting Chinese professors to conduct research on the EU and to teach college students, can enhance the credibility of EU public diplomacy and cross the cultural barriers which exist between the EU and China.

Again, emphasizing the influence of the messenger does not rule out the importance of message in public diplomacy. Instead, it offers a new perceptive to study the effect of public diplomacy in general and the EU's practice in particular. As one of the first few attempts to consider the Jean Monnet Programme within the theoretical framework of public diplomacy by proxy, this paper addresses how EU public diplomacy by proxy is conducted on the ground, through launching EU studies programmes and possessing comparative advantages in the toolbox of EU public diplomacy. However, since public diplomacy aims to influence the perceptions of a foreign audience, the influence of the Jean Monnet Programme on college students – based on empirical data collected from the students attending the relevant modules – could be used to examine its effect, which merits further study.